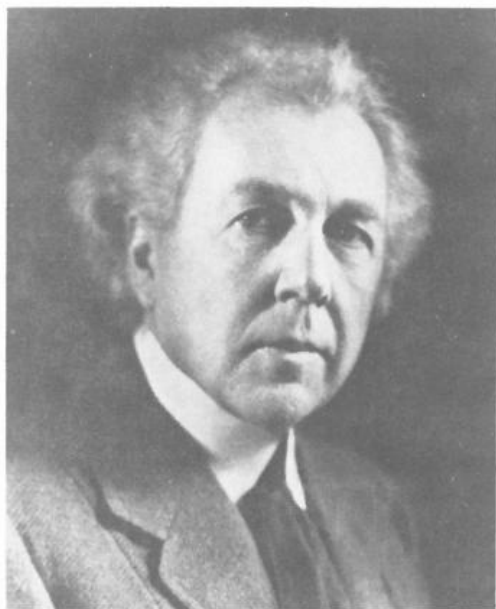


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Frank Lloyd Wright
1867-1959

Although Frank Lloyd Wright built nothing in Maine, he left evidence of one project for the state, a vacation bungalow designed for Mrs. Aline (David) Devin in 1906 and intended for a site in Eliot. Though small, this project deserves at least brief consideration, not only because of the fame of its architect, but also because it illustrates Wright's design principles in an unusually compact form, revealing how much rigor in planning and spatial manipulation could be packed into the bungalow type. Wright himself thought enough of the design to exhibit it at the Chicago Architectural Club exhibition of 1907.¹

Both client and architect lived in Chicago. Ten years earlier, near the beginning of his independent career, Wright had designed for Devin a large and intricate house intended for an urban site on Lake Michigan, a design also never executed.² By 1906 Wright was in full stride at the head of a group of *avant garde* architects in Chicago and was widely known, especially for his innovative residential design. It is probable that Devin chose Eliot due to her connection with the Bahá'í religion. Near her

property is Green Acre, a hotel converted into a Bahá'í retreat center in 1900.³ Devin's lot was overlooking Mast Cove on the north edge of the Piscataqua River. At the time the site was open land with views to the southwest and west.

Wright's design survives in two sheets of working drawings (Figures 1 & 2). A single story of carefully articulated pieces is unified by a broad unbroken hipped roof, resulting in deep roof overhangs around most of the perimeter. The articulation of pieces allows the main spaces (porch, living room and two bedrooms) to be opened on three sides. To judge by the topography of the site and the grade lines on the elevations, the house fronts south, towards the river, turning its service entrance to the road and opening the main spaces to views across the water.

The wood frame structure rises over a low stone foundation. Up to the window sills the exterior walls are covered with split logs or shingles. Above this line wood shingles were specified. The roof, too, is shingled, giving the house an overall rough, "natural" texture appropriate for its use and site. Near the center of the house a broad stone chimney rises above the roof. The casement windows have diamond paned glass, and the porch balustrade consists of closely spaced square spindles, details typical of Arts and Crafts design of the period.

The plan observes strict symmetry around the long axis. The main entry is through a large porch, strongly defined at the corners and with built-in seats to the sides. Five doors open into the living room, at the opposite end of which is a massive brick fireplace block, formally centered on axis. This space has a basilical section. Corner closets define low ceilinged "aisles" lit by rows of windows, below which are built-in bookcases and cabinets. The center "nave" of the space rises to a cathedral ceiling. Plaster and simple wood trim finish the space. The cathedral metaphor is completed by the cruciform arrangement of spaces in the rear half of the house. A kitchen and two bedrooms project from a central

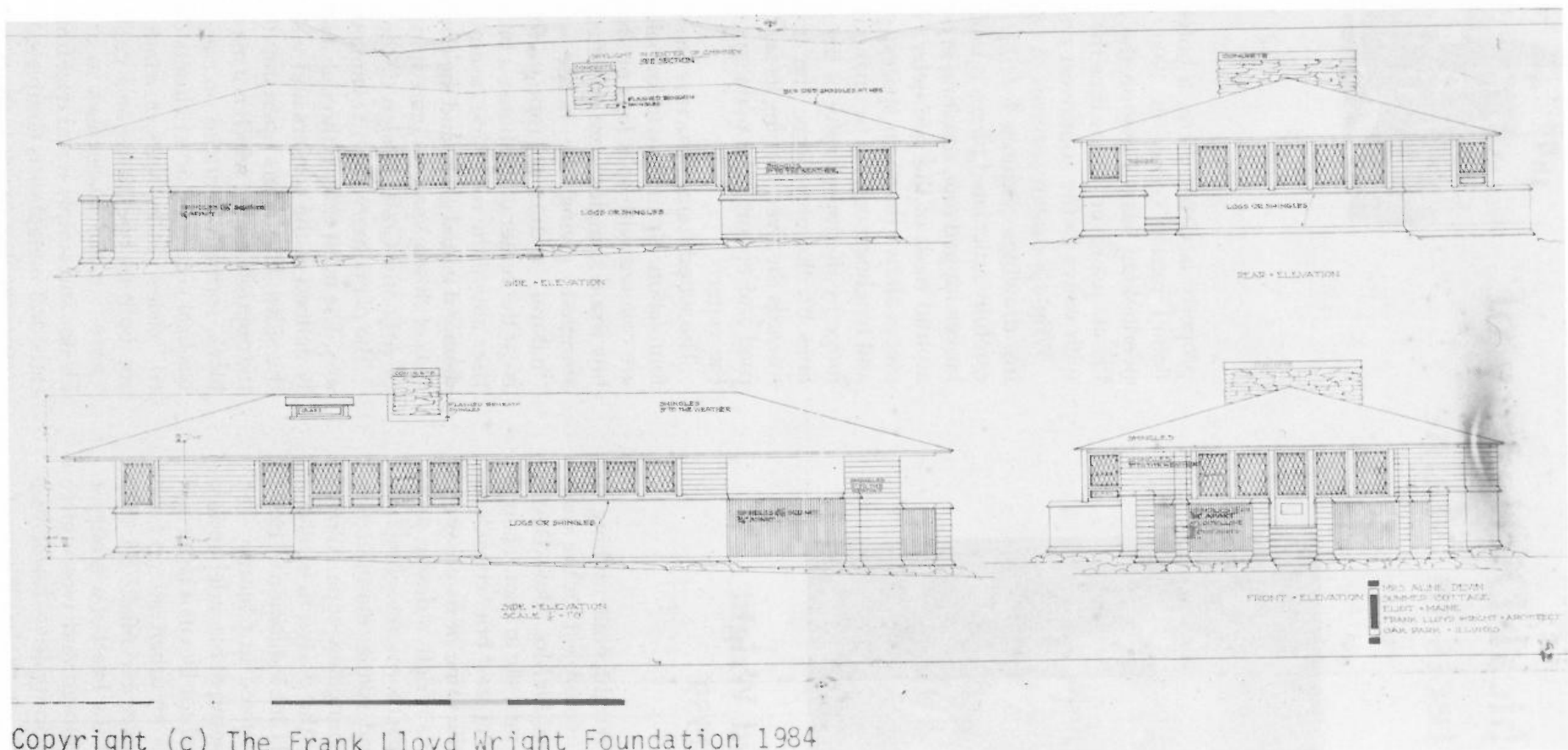


Figure 1. Elevations of the Devin Cottage, Eliot, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1906 (Courtesy of The Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation).

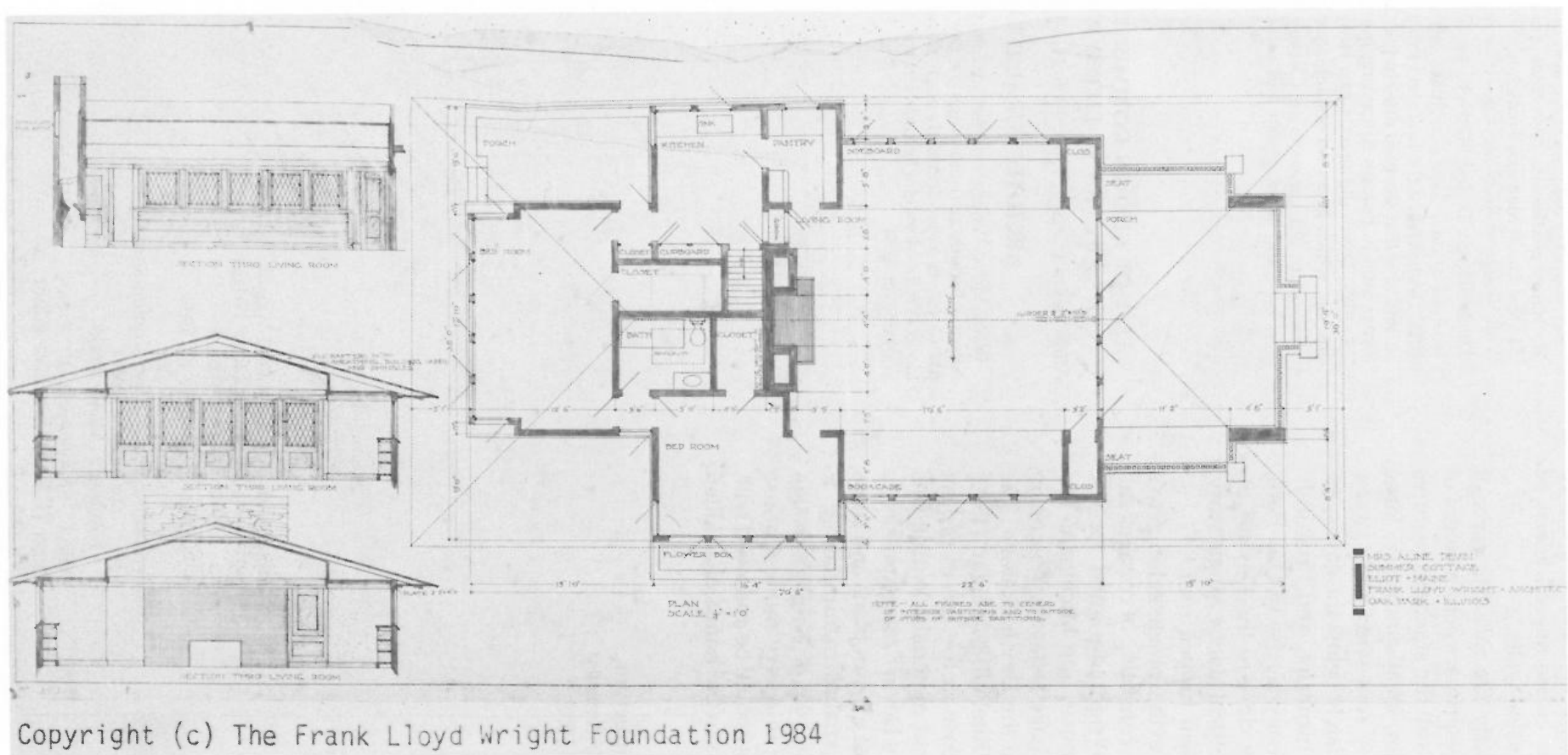


Figure 2. Floor Plan and Sections of the Devin Cottage, Eliot, by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1906 (Courtesy of The Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation).

core with closets, skylit bathroom, and stairs to the attic. In each bedroom rows of windows, which wrap around the corners, create special zones of space along the main exterior walls.

The Devin Cottage clearly fits into the class of Wright's Prairie House, the primary achievement of his early career. It contains all the standard features of the type: cruciform plan, local symmetry, large center fireplace block, low roof with wide eaves, bands of windows immediately below the eaves, extensive porches, built-in furniture, and "natural" materials. The Edwin Cheney House in Oak Park, Illinois (1904) is especially close to the Devin Cottage in its carefully symmetrical layout, single story, and all-embracing unbroken hipped roof.⁴

More specifically, the Devin Cottage belongs to a subset of the Prairie House consisting of cottages and vacation homes which Wright designed for the woods and lakes of Wisconsin and Michigan. The Charles S. Ross House of Lake Delavan, Wisconsin (1902) is similar in plan to the Devin Cottage. The Walter Gerts House in Whitehall, Michigan (1902) is an executed example close to the Devin project in size, exterior design, and materials. Within this class of vacation homes, the Devin Cottage possesses one of the clearest and most elegant plans and some of the most interesting spatial manipulation. It demonstrates that the principles of Wright's design could be carried out even in a very modest house and that the small bungalow could be endowed with great architectural richness in the hands of a skilled architect.

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June, 1985

NOTES

- ¹ Brief notices of the project are in Henry Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1942, p. 115 and Grant Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1958, p. 216.
- ² Hitchcock, p. 27 and Manson, pp. 73-75.
- ³ In the National Bahá'í Archives are records indicating that Mrs. Devin visited the founder of that faith in the Holy Land in 1907 and that she paid dues to the Green Acre Fellowship. Letter from R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram to Roger Reed, July 22, 1985. Devin did erect a two story vernacular cottage on the site which bears no resemblance to Wright's design.
- ⁴ Manson, p. 179, connects the Cheney House with the bungalow type and gives a plan and exterior view.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Aline Devin Cottage, Eliot, 1906, Not Executed.

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

Frank Lloyd Wright's papers at Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona include two drawings for the Devin Cottage. These drawings are reproduced through the courtesy of The Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation and are copyright (c) by The Foundation 1984.

Photograph of Frank Lloyd Wright
Courtesy of The Frank Lloyd Wright
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